



RCD Outlook 2002

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RCD Cleans Up Mill Creek

In 2001, the DOC awarded the Inland Empire West RCD a grant to promote watershed awareness and to reduce the polluting of Mill Creek, which drains into the Prado Basin. The RCD planned a clean up of an illegal dumping site on the banks of Mill Creek along the south side of Chino-Corona Road.

The project was designed to invigorate the community, reduce pollution, and to increase awareness of illegal dumping along Mill Creek. To publicize and facilitate this effort, the RCD contacted local schools to promote and sponsor a poster contest that focused on stopping pollution. The winners were given an award and the winning poster was used at the clean up site. Finally, after months of coordination, countless meetings, aggressive outreach efforts, and extensive advertising, the weekend of the clean up arrived.



Local students display prize winning poster

The initial reaction of the volunteers was shock. Along the creek, there were piles of trash, tires, rotted animal carcasses, furniture, appliances, and abandoned vehicles. Without a doubt, the task was formidable. However, the volunteers pulled up their sleeves, gritted their teeth, and began the tedious and dirty job of cleaning up the site. During the event, the volunteers removed more than 300 tires and almost 10 tons of trash and debris. A private company removed the abandoned vehicles at no cost. Another company hauled away the tires, again at no charge. During clean up on the first day, an owner of a local truck company drove by and saw the volunteers working along the creek. He offered to provide a large loader and an operator for the two-day event, absolutely free. Private citizens, local businesses, and government agencies came together to make this a successful project.



Paul Hogan, IEWRCD, helps dispose of the many tires

This two-day event clearly demonstrates the impact that an RCD can have in its local community. The organization worked effectively with other local agencies, volunteers, and private businesses to make a difference. Today, Mill Creek is cleaner and the site has improved significantly. Currently, the RCD is working with the county to construct a fence at the site to

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Mono County Ranch Management Tour

Division 9 of the Public Resources Code authorizes RCDs to provide the citizens in their district with conservation education opportunities. On June 1st 2002, Mono County RCD exercised this right by holding a ranch management tour. The tour highlighted different ranch management techniques used by landowners in the Owens Valley. Tour participants had the opportunity to compare three different management styles. Each stop on the tour also included hands-on educational activities and lectures designed to give attendees some of the knowledge needed to assess the health of their own properties. Approximately 35 landowners attended the tour. Many were new to the area and appreciated the opportunity to learn about the history of land management in the valley.



Community members sign up for tour

The first stop was at the 2395 acre Rosachi ranch that had been previously irrigated and grazed. The current managers discontinued irrigating and grazing in 1995. The RCD provided a tour book that included historic pictures of the ranch which allowed participants to see the effects of the no grazing - no irrigation management style. The present day ranch was barren and was experiencing severe wind erosion. While at this ranch tour attendees learned how to assess wind erosion potential.



Tour participant estimates wind erosion potential

Ed Blake, NRCS, lead participants in a hands on wind erosion exercise. Ed also taught attendees why wind erosion is detrimental to ranch health and gave tips on how to prevent it. The wind erosion exercise was followed by a demonstration and a practice ground cover estimation exercise lead by Jane Schmidt from NRCS. During this portion of the tour, the NRCS employees also lectured about some of the issues threatening watershed health, such as the potential for an invasion by the noxious weed, Tall Whitetop.

The tour continued on to the Thompson Ranch which continues to irrigate, but no longer allows grazing. Ranch owners discontinued their grazing leases in the

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Watershed Coordinator Legislative Report Now Available

The Watershed Coordinator Grant Program: Report to the Legislature is now available on the DOC website and on compact disc. The report highlights the accomplishments of the 30 DOC funded RCD Watershed Coordinators. To access the report on the internet visit our website at:

<http://www.consrv.ca.gov/dlrp/RCD>. The report is on the publications page. The report is very large and can be slow downloading. If you would like a copy on compact disc contact Jenny Pickel at (916) 324-0774.

Mono County RCD Tour, continued

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Kim Hansen, MRCD, gives introduction to a tour stop

spring of 2000. Volunteers from People for Mono Basin Preservation (PMBP) continue to irrigate 68 acres that provide critical habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife. This management practice has resulted in a build-up of dead matter that has quickly become a fire hazard. The dead matter also impairs the ability for grasses and forbs to reseed and, therefore, reduces the overall plant diversity.

The stop at Thompson ranch also included a demonstration of irrigation water management. Vada Hubbard, NRCS, used a small display to demonstrate different irrigation techniques, including flood irrigation and furrow irrigation. This demonstration, along with

information about irrigation management provided in the tour book, gave tour participants information they can use when irrigating their own properties.

The final stop was at the Conway Ranch. In contrast to the first two ranches, the Conway Ranch is both irrigated and grazed. For over 100 years, the picturesque ranch has averted development. The ranch is home to sheep and an innovative aquaculture operation. The manager of the aquaculture operation explained how the operation was created. Dan Lyster of the Sierra Trout Foundation gave tour participants a detailed overview of how the operation works and a lively fish feeding demonstration. The stop gave participants the chance to see a ranch used for a variety of purposes including fish rearing, sheep grazing, wildlife habitat, recreation, and housing.

Overall the tour was a great success. Participants were able to see and compare different management techniques being used in their area. Furthermore, they were introduced to important land management concepts such as soil health and irrigation management. The RCD produced a video of the tour and plans to share it with others in their community. In addition to the initial public tour, the RCD provided a second tour for agency and legislative representatives. Mono RCD plans to conduct similar tours in the future.

Conservation education activities such as the Mono RCD ranch tour can lead to increased awareness and land management improvements. Such activities can be an excellent public relations tool for RCDs. Those who attend an educational event can learn about issues within their district as well as the RCDs role in addressing those issues. The Mono County RCD tour is one example of many successful RCD education efforts throughout the state.

Mill Creek Clean up, continued

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prevent future dumping. The sign, developed by the students, will be placed at the site as a reminder for everyone to do their part in preventing pollution.

Written by Robert Shun, RCD Assistance Program Grant Coordinator

Is My Project Exempt From CEQA?

So you've finally decided to take care of that bank erosion problem on the small stream you have on the west side of the back forty. The actual work won't be hard and it shouldn't take too long either, but you're not so sure about all that environmental permitting stuff you've heard about. You think to yourself, "Hmm, maybe I can get an exemption. After all, I'm helping the environment out, not hurting it". That's a good point, but here are some things to consider regarding exemptions and the California Environmental Quality Act or CEQA.



CEQA applies only to discretionary government activities that are defined as "projects". A project is defined as the whole of an action that has the potential for resulting in either a direct physical change in the environment or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment. A project under CEQA is considered to be any activity that is supported, in whole or in part, through public agency contracts, grants, subsidies, loans or other assistance from a public agency, or an activity involving the public agency issuance of a lease, permit, license, certificate, or other entitlement for use by a person or public agency.

In this instance, the activity will involve sloping back the stream bank and planting some riparian vegetation to keep the soil in place. Any time you have work to do in a stream or watercourse, you can bet that there's a permit or two involved and that your activity will be considered a project under CEQA.

But let's assume the need for a permit or environmental review is less clear. The first step to determine if a permit is needed or if your activity qualifies for an exemption from CEQA is to call or visit your local government planning agency. Your planning agency will be able to tell you if a local permit is required and also advise you of any state or federal permits that may be needed and who to contact. If a local permit is required, the local planning agency becomes the CEQA lead agency and is responsible for conducting the environmental review. If a local permit is not required but a state permit is (such as a stream alteration agreement), the state agency issuing the permit becomes the CEQA lead agency. If a federal permit is required then you may also have to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and that's another story best left to a future article.

After checking with your local planning agency you find out that the work definitely requires a permit. The next step is for the lead agency to conduct a preliminary review to determine if your project qualifies for a CEQA exemption. Exemptions fall into four primary categories: statutory, categorical, general rule, and disapproved project.

Statutory exemptions are activities that the State Legislature has exempted from CEQA. A project that falls within this category is not subject to CEQA even though it has the potential to adversely affect the environment. There are dozens of statutory exemptions, but most are very specific to certain types of projects. It is very unlikely that a conservation project similar to the example

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CEQA Exemptions, continued

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discussed here would qualify for a statutory exemption.

A categorical exemption is for a class of projects that the Secretary of Resources determines generally will not have a significant effect on the environment. The Resources Agency has established 32 classes of categorical exemptions, many of which have special limitations. There are too many classes to list here; however, classes seven and eight allow an exemption for certain actions by regulatory agencies to maintain, restore, or enhance natural resources or the environment other than construction activities, where the regulatory process includes procedures to protect the environment. Consequently, classes seven and eight leave open the possibility of implementing a streamlined permit process, similar to what was accomplished by Sustainable Conservation in the Elkhorn Slough Watershed in Monterey County. Because these two classes specify actions of regulatory agencies, they would not cover our example of a landowner improving his stream bank.

The general rule exemption applies to activities where it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility the activity in question will have a significant effect on the environment. Convincing your lead agency that your project qualifies for this exemption is a very hard sell indeed.

Finally, there is the disapproved exemption. This exemption is reserved for projects that a lead agency knows will be rejected or disapproved, even before the review process begins. If your project qualifies for this exemption, don't celebrate.

You find yourself back at the beginning now still hoping that your project might be exempt from CEQA, but better informed about what that means. It's pretty clear that qualifying for an exemption is not easy. Most projects must undergo environmental review and we'll start to talk about that process in the next article.

Written by Andrew Rush, RCD Assistance Program, Environmental Specialist

Coming Soon to an Area Near You

The DOC RCD Assistance Program is in the process of holding a series of grant writing workshops in locations throughout California. Following is a list of currently scheduled workshops. Please note, dates are subject to change.

July 23rd - Fresno State University Center For Irrigation Technology, Fresno CA, 9:30am—5pm

August 14th - Red Bluff State Building

October - Victorville



Please call Jenny Pickel at (916) 324-0774 to reserve a spot at one of these workshops or if your RCD would like to host a grant writing workshop in the future.